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Novaya Gazeta, the last independent newspaper in Russia, falls silent

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6-8 minutes

RIGA, Latvia — A day after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, independent newspaper Novaya Gazeta conveyed its shock in a three-word banner headline against a somber black background: “Russia. Bombs. Ukraine.”

Just over a month later, this last Russian newspaper publishing independent news about the war against Ukraine — edited by Nobel laureate Dmitry Muratov — announced Monday it was suspending operations until the end of the war after getting a second warning from Roskomnadzor, Russia’s tech and communications regulator.

“It is the disappearance of the last independent publication that had not yet been blocked,” said Andrei Kolesnikov, a political analyst at the Carnegie Moscow Center and a former editor of the paper, calling it “a huge loss for the giant Internet audience and a catastrophe for those fans of the newspaper who read it on paper.”

The invasion edition — published in Russian and Ukrainian — sold out within hours on Feb. 25. Two weeks later, its cover depicted “Swan Lake’s” “dance of the swans” silhouetted against a fiery mushroom cloud, with the headline, “An issue of ‘Novaya,’

created in accordance with all the rules of Russia's **amended** Criminal Code."

The headline eloquently conveyed the difficulties of reporting on the war under Russia's harsh new censorship laws; even the words "war," "invasion" and "attack" are banned, and publishing information that discredits the military is criminalized. Analysts warn there is no guarantee that [the restrictions](#) — introduced as **tough** wartime measures **amid** what the Kremlin calls "an unprecedented information war" against Russia — will ever be lifted.

Kolesnikov said the only reason the newspaper had managed to continue publishing as long as it had was because of Muratov's authority.

"It's hard to say how long the suspension will last, because even if the 'special operation' ends, the authoritarian regime which crushed all independent media in Russia will not go away," he said. "The Kremlin and Lubyanka can enjoy the complete emptiness of an alternative — that is professional, not propaganda — information space," he said referring to Lubyanka, the headquarters of the FSB, a successor to the KGB.

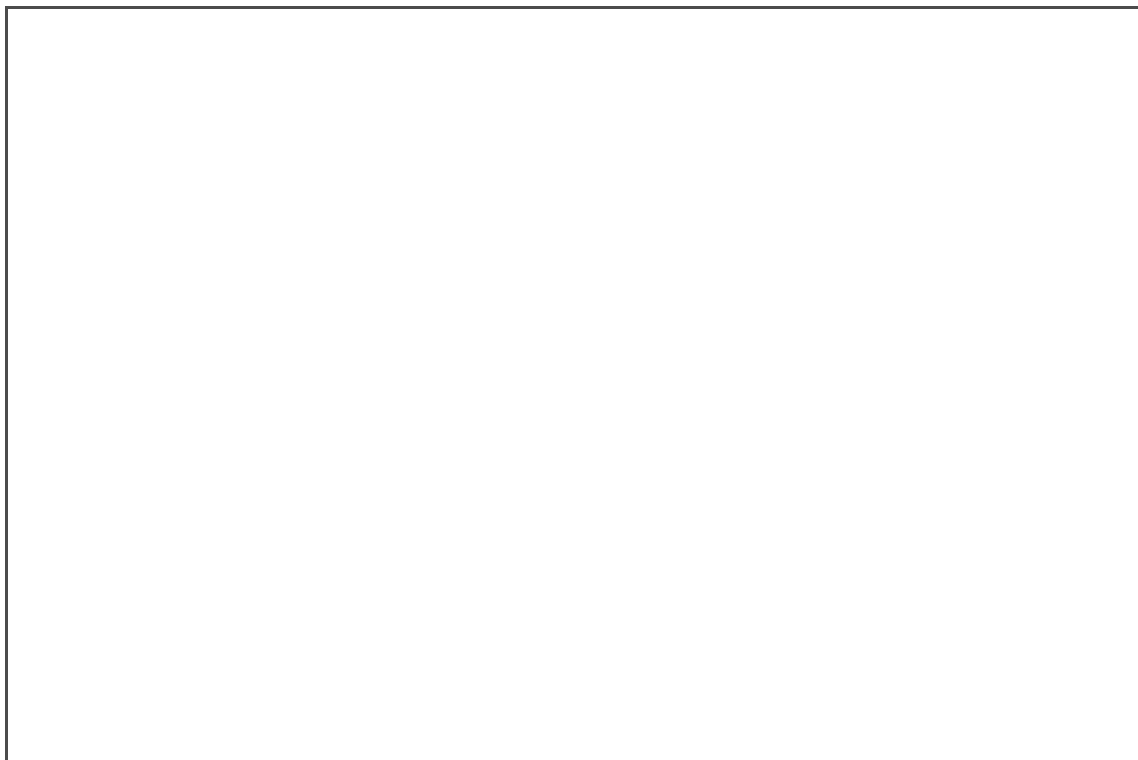
Since the invasion, Russian authorities have blocked dozens of Russian independent media **outlets**, including Dozhd television, whose journalists left Russia, and Echo of Moscow radio, disbanded by its board, which is controlled by state-owned gas company Gazprom.

Hundreds of journalists have fled the country, although independent media still air news reports on YouTube and Telegram.

Novaya Gazeta's continued reporting on the war until now,

including **dispatches** from Ukraine about civilian casualties, carefully **skirted** the legal red line. But the coverage still apparently proved too much for Russian authorities, amid a state television propaganda **blitz** designed to unite the nation behind the war and to convince Russians that the war is a limited, just and necessary operation to destroy “Nazis” and protect Russia. State and pro-Kremlin media blame the massive damage to civilian neighborhoods in Ukrainian cities such as Mariupol and Kharkiv on Ukraine.

Novaya Gazeta, with a loyal audience of urban intellectuals, liberals and opposition supporters, has often fallen **foul** of Russia’s authorities. Six of its journalists were assassinated between 2000 and 2009, including Anna Politkovskaya, who reported fearlessly on Russia’s abuses in Chechnya, shot dead in the elevator of her apartment building in 2006.



Journalists at Russian investigative newspaper Novaya Gazeta work at the independent media outlet's editorial office in Moscow on March 24, 2021. (Natalia Kolesnikova/AFP/Getty Images)

The newspaper's announcement that it was suspending publication was contained in a brief two-paragraph statement Monday that came shortly after the Roskomnadzor warning. Under Russian law, a newspaper can be **stripped** of its license if it gets two warnings in a year. Muratov declined to comment.

The second warning was based not on the newspaper's wartime coverage but **ono** a technical **misdemeanor** — failing to correctly label an **NGO** as a “foreign agent.” (Russia has pressured dozens of activists, journalists and nongovernment organizations by designating them as foreign agents.)

Novaya Gazeta's mission statement reads: “Our journalists are not afraid to get the truth to show it to you. In a country where the authorities constantly want to ban something, including a ban on telling the truth, there should be publications that continue to engage in real journalism.”

Elena Kostyuchenko risked her life reporting from Ukraine to do so. Her story Saturday from Russian-occupied Kherson in Ukraine reported on civilian casualties, including children. It also covered **rallies** against Russian occupation, Russia's blocking of humanitarian aid to the city, and Russia's abduction and beating of Kherson journalists, activists, protest organizers and Ukrainian military members. The article identified a secret prison where those arrested were taken.

An earlier report **poignantly** described civilian bodies in Mykolaiv, including that of a 3-year-old girl. She also described the beautifully manicured hands of a young woman's corpse.

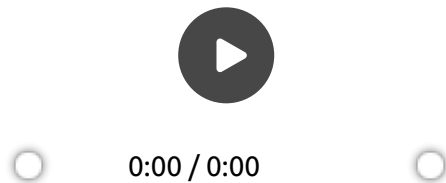
Another reporter for the newspaper, Elena Milashina, said on social media Monday that she was in the middle of a story about Chechen servicemen, Russian guards and volunteers killed in the war.

“Since it is now impossible for me to inform readers on the pages or website of Novaya, I will do so on Facebook if possible,” she said, which is only accessible using a VPN. She had three big reporting projects in the works and planned to finish them, saying, “No one but me will do it.”

“Right now people are dying in Ukraine because of our weapons,” she wrote. “What happens next — to my journalism, to my newspaper and to my country — we all have to figure out together. It will be long and hard. Still, I hope we have a future.”

Milashina thanked her loyal readers, **and even her haters**, for reading.

Mary Ilyushina contributed to this report.



Marina Ovsyannikova burst onto the set of Russia's state TV flagship program on March 14, holding a poster that read "stop the war." (Video: Channel One, Photo: Channel One)